

[Search this site](#)[Home](#)**LIVE UPDATES**[News](#)[Sport](#)[Entertainment](#)[RSS Feeds](#)**MAIN SECTIONS**[News](#)[Sport](#)[Business](#)[Politician 2007](#)[Politics](#)[Scottish Budget](#)► **Features**[Going Out](#)[Herald Society](#)[Our Awards](#)[Herald Forum](#)[Appointments](#)[Homes](#)[Motors Online](#)[Property Awards](#)[Recruitment Awards](#)**BLOGS**[Herald Blogs](#)**ELECTION 2007**[Election Archive](#)**EDINBURGH FESTIVALS**[Film Festival](#)[Book Festival](#)[Art Festival](#)[Tattoo](#)[Herald Angels](#)

Justice is the casualty in this Britain of secrets

[IAN BELL](#)

December 22 2007

[Comment](#) | [Read Comments \(8\)](#)

To the inexperienced eye, the early forensic work seemed anything but slapdash. The white-suited figures picking their way in the rain through the rubble of Omagh's narrow main street had the air of people studying an archaeological site, trying to find a pattern in apparent chaos. So it seemed.

Sometimes shattered glass crunched beneath their feet. Now and then the broken bones of a building would settle and groan. In Northern Ireland, nevertheless, there was no shortage of expertise for the sort of work that was being conducted with such care. So it seemed.

Among the media behind the police lines there was no shortage of agreement, either. It was already known that this was the biggest, bloodiest terrorist "spectacular" of them all. No effort would be spared to find the perpetrators. Nor, this time, was there the whisper of a word to excuse, explain or defend them. The self-validating conspiracy theories - the Brits did it - would be applied retrospectively.

Omagh is hard to describe. I don't mean the brute facts: the 29 dead, nine children and a woman pregnant with twins among them, or the hundreds wounded in body and mind in a country town with no sectarian history. I don't mean the physics, either, the way in which materials react to blast and heat to make, sometimes, a bizarre sort of found art.

advertisement Omagh was numbing. The shock wave travelled far and left no-one untouched. It went deep, too. This is hard to say without appearing to diminish 3000 and more other deaths, but Omagh horrified a province that was, supposedly, inured to horror. It was (and who invented this scale?) beyond what could be endured. Anyone who regarded it as just another "mis-calculated" act of war lacked the nerve to say so.

That, however, was another reason to believe that Omagh's killers would be found quickly. A peace of sorts had come to the north, but it was a new thing, and precarious. Clearly,



BLOWN APART: Omagh was the most deadly terror atrocity in Northern Ireland, yet errors made by the police in their investigation led to the acquittal of the chief suspect.

IN YOUR AREA[Weather](#)[Local News Search](#)

**CLICK HERE
to register**

POLITICIAN AWARDS

The Herald
**SCOTTISH
POLITICIAN**
of the Year Awards 2007

GLASGOW 2014

In association with

**CLASSIFIEDS**Browse our
classifieds**FAMILY NOTICES**Browse our NEW
family notices**FIND A CAR**Search our extensive
online cars database**THE HERALD**Delivered to your door
0141 302 7300

TravelShop
We know what you
want from a holiday

VIDEO REPORTS

Video Week
Fashion Awards
Motors videos
Film Trailers
Paulo Coelho
Glasgow 2014
Edwin Morgan
Aye Write
Music Festival
Irish Dance
Video Archive

PICTURE GALLERY

Reader Pictures
Diana inquest
Great Scots Run
Politician awards
Mitchell Library
Student Showcase
A day in the life

SERVICES

Order Your Paper
Search This Site
Free Daily Email
Back Issues
News Archive
Photo Sales
Contact us
Help & FAQs
Digital Edition

FAVOURITES

Crosswords
The Diary
Letters
Local News
Local Dating
Local Weather
Week In Photos
Today's page 1
225 Years of News

ADVERTISING

Book ads online
View ads online

the atrocity was intended to return the province to war. So who - the elementary question - had the motive? Not many.

Some people would later nominate agents of the British state to explain why two warnings were, apparently, ignored. Abundant evidence of disgraceful security service behaviour in other cases - up to and including contracted murders - was employed to describe a plot intended to discredit Sinn Fein and an IRA cease-fire. But nominated assassinations and indiscriminate mass murder are very different things.

Irish republicanism's history of ideals betrayed and revenges exacted was always a better place to start. The self-styled Real IRA existed, such as it was, to "continue the struggle". Gerry Adams and Martin McGuinness had settled for negotiations, for less than the old dream. Omagh's point was to make their task impossible, their strategy unworkable. Instead, it did the opposite. Peace held, was strengthened. Even rogue MI5 agents might have seen that coming.

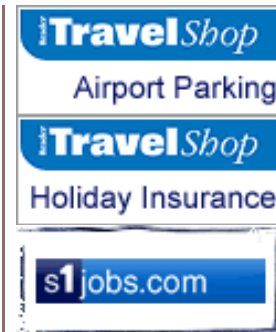
It should, in any case, have simplified police efforts on both sides of the border. The group behind Omagh was a small one, self-defining and, in intelligence terms, self-advertising. Evidence liable to stand up in court might be hard to come by. Terrorism, as a government pursuing indefinite detention likes to remind us, is like that. Nevertheless, this was an area in which the Royal Ulster Constabulary and the Gardai had a deal of unwelcome experience.

Reading the conclusions of Mr Justice Weir, sitting alone in a Diplock court almost nine and a half years after the bombing, and almost a year after the end of the three-month trial of Sean Gerard Hoey, you could almost begin to believe the conspiracy theorists. Carelessness, stupidity, incompetence, dilatory leadership, arrogance, complacency, tainted DNA evidence, lying coppers: the judge in Belfast was left with no choice. He had no choice but to acquit Hoey, nine years after the electrician became a suspect, and he had no choice but to damn the police. Their efforts were, in every sense, too bad to be true.

This had been pointed out before. Ombudsman Nuala O'Loan was treated to a campaign of vicious denigration - and in the case of Peter Mandelson, silky Stormont contempt - when she reached much the same conclusions as Judge Reg Weir. Sir Ronnie Flanagan, then head of policing in Northern Ireland, even said he would commit suicide if he once thought O'Loan's documented allegations were correct. Instead, Sir Ronnie is these days the Chief Inspector of Constabulary. His position is in some doubt at the time (about time) of writing, but he remains hale and hearty.

It is possible, even likely, that Flanagan takes the view adopted by the Met's Sir Ian Blair after Jean Charles De Menezes was shot in the head at Stockwell Tube station in 2005. How reasonable is it to expect one individual to accept personal responsibility for the actions - or inaction - of so many subordinates? It is reasonable, apparently, to accept a knighthood for their work in the better times.

But terrorism manifests itself with a mixture of brutal simplicity and fiendish complexity.



Classifieds
Family notices
Courses
Business online
Advert guide

RELATED SITES

Evening Times
Sunday Herald
Newsquest UK
Travel Shop
Jobs

Split-second decisions are required, fine judgments are involved, wider issues are always at stake. And "terrible mistakes" - a warning overlooked, an innocent man misidentified - do happen. Good enough?

Actually, conceivably, yes. Sometimes, when the truth, all of it, has been told, those answers might suffice. The state requires its servants to combat those who put our common security at risk. We could argue over motives, perspectives, tactics, ideologies, resources, even conspiracies, but the possibility of error, pure or otherwise, is undeniable. As is the possibility that important men sometimes evade both truth and responsibility.

Why is Blair still in his post after his blatant attempts to delay the Independent Police Complaints Commission (IPCC) investigation - a statutory obligation - into the De Menezes shooting? Why is Flanagan allowed to inspect constabulary, a joke in very poor taste, when the government is contributing £800,000 to the "exceptional case" private prosecution being mounted by the Omagh families? Disparate cases do not afford generalised conclusions, whatever the conspiracy theorists might believe, but some patterns are impossible to ignore.

The IPCC will not now be taking action against four Met officers for their roles in the killing of De Menezes. As with Omagh, no-one is being held to account. Combine crude with legal, and you could say this: no-one did it. Yet, in the matter of Lockerbie, the biggest atrocity of all in these islands, we are offered the surreal converse: officially, one man did it. Except, of course, he did not.

Abdelbaset Ali Mohamed al Megrahi will be plucked from Scottish justice, and from his belated exoneration, in a deal whose existence was denied by our former Prime Minister while the Crown, citing a public interest it will not define, withholds a key document from a Scottish court. The document might demonstrate a miscarriage of justice. A reasonable person will ask, such being the case, why the Crown has elected to obstruct a court.

The truth is known to some, but not granted to all. On what authority? In each of these cases, judges have proved impotent and justice has been denied, blatantly, shamelessly. A pattern does not prove a theory. It certainly does not prove conspiracy. But this secret Britain has begun to stink, and stink badly.

© All rights reserved. Reproduction in whole or in part without [permission](#) is prohibited.

 email article to a friend  print article  larger type  smaller type

Post this article to:

[Del.icio.us](#) :: [Newsvine](#) :: [NowPublic](#) :: [Reddit](#) :: [Yahoo](#)

 [Add Comment](#)

Posted by: Charles McGrory, Glasgow on 1:42pm Sat 22 Dec 07

Well said Ian.

Omagh massacre - No one guilty, John Scarlett acquiesces to falsified WMD dossier and promoted to head MI5, Illegal Wars, Saudi Corruption Investigation halted, De Menezes head blown apart without challenge - No one guilty or even held reckless or incompetent.

Typical of the British State: Promotion of the Guilty; Punishment of the Innocent.

And now Tony Blair – war criminal – welcomed by the Catholic Church Hierarchy and no public confession...

It makes you weep. And they want re-elected...

[Quote](#) | [Report this post](#)

Posted by: clare, lanarkshire on 2:41pm Sat 22 Dec 07

Ian I hope this is the first of many calls from leading journalists for the truth. I also hope you're going to get a lot tougher on the issue in subsequent articles.

This week's developments re Lockerbie are for me shocking as over and over I am asking why would a government want to attempt to stop us getting at the truth of something that happened over Scottish skies. I am also asking why the Scottish press as a single body is not screaming the same from front pages and editorials.

Charles I agree with what you say but you should also include the press in all of it. They are the ones charged with the responsibility of reporting "the news" yet increasingly they are failing utterly to do so. It makes them part of it. I do not grudge any newspaper its right to a political persuasion, we all have those, but even if we believe a particular Party to be the right one, it doesn't render us incapable of demanding explanations when that is appropriate. It isn't disloyal to do that.

If this whole thing with Megrahi comes to pass, if a government is permitted to hide documents relating to that appeal then the press must not let them away with it. Why would anyone want a man possibly not guilty of that crime to remain convicted for it? The only answer to that is that they don't want the real truth to come out. Why would they not want the real truth to come out? I now think the answer to that one must be truly horrifying indeed. Nevertheless we cannot forget what happened at Lockerbie or the terrible cost to those who died, to their families and to all of us. We must demand the truth and if even the Scottish media seems reluctant to do that then clearly this whole thing stinks even more than we first thought.

[Quote](#) | [Report this post](#)

Posted by: Devil is a Jewish Catholic, Tel Aviv/Rome on 2:51pm Sat 22 Dec 07

While we are at Dirty Little Secrets, how about Peter Power's company running parallel terrorist drills in 7/7, identical to the events that took place on 7/7 ??

7/7, 9/11 were both self inflicted wounds and the whole shower including the new Nazi/Catholic Tony Blair should be held accountable.

Mainstream media has been warned about talking about 7/7 and 9/11 issues under threat from political paymasters.

Still, not to worry, X-Factor and Pop Idol keep the masses amused whilst state sponsored murder goes on unabated.

[Quote](#) | [Report this post](#)

Posted by: Los Angeles, Edinburgh on 5:48pm Sat 22 Dec 07

Excellent piece - the author is always better on the attack than trying to muster satire as an observer.

[Quote](#) | [Report this post](#)

Posted by: John, Leicester on 6:00pm Sat 22 Dec 07

To answer your question Clare, it is for the same reason that we allowed rendition flights by the CIA. The UK is a client state of the USA. We do what they say.

[Quote](#) | [Report this post](#)

Posted by: Jim, Irvine on 9:59pm Sat 22 Dec 07

The Force Intelligence Group investigated by Sir John Stevens in 2003 was accused of Atrocities against the ' Peoples of Northern Ireland '. He submitted this charge to Tony Blair ; there was sufficient evidence to charge them he claimed. But Blair reckoned that this

Group could serve the UK well in Iraq.
I agree with everything Ian Bell has written about the Secret British State. Perhaps the next phase of your Journalism Adventure Ian should be an in Depth Investigation Piece on the Force Intelligence Groups game in Iraq.
The Sectarian Atrocities committed in Iraq are a mirror image of the Ulster disaster. Blairs entry into the Catholic Church is a disaster for the large number of Catholics who were against the Iraq war.
I believe if the Catholic Church ran a Referendum on Anthony Blairs suitability to be a Member it would result in a Large Majority in telling him to stay where he belongs.

[Quote](#) | [Report this post](#)

Posted by: lang spin, Fife/Carlisle on 4:25am Sun 23 Dec 07

Admiration for Ian Bell stems from his remarkable ability to have observed up-close the lies of life without succumbing to a terminal cynicism. His tone is Le Care at his driest. But having lifted so many stones (Sisyphus yet) and keeled within that other world of a life of lies, does he still believe he may yet find a final truth ahent the 'stains'?

[Quote](#) | [Report this post](#)

Posted by: food lover, west coast on 10:50am Mon 24 Dec 07

There may be much in what you say Ian, but the implication behind your piece is that this is all new.

It isn't of course and governments of all persuasions have been plotting, covering up and bending the rules since Biblical times.

(The Christmas story seems a seasonal reminder...)

It's in the nature of the beast as ministers become detached from reality (as they do) and the middle ranks have to deliver on the ground.

Sometimes too much knowledge is just as bad as not knowing anything - believe me!

But nothing will change - of that you can be certain.

[Quote](#) | [Report this post](#)

Add your comment

Name:

Email: *

Location:

**

346-462

e.g. 123-123

Comment:

Please note: All HTML tags will be ignored.

Format Text:

By posting a comment, I confirm that I have read and agree to the [terms of use](#). Comments are not moderated but we will react if anything that breaks the rules comes to our attention and we may delete inappropriate postings. Please treat other people with respect. You must not post anything that is abusive, indecent, unlawful or defamatory. Remember, you are personally liable for what you post on this site. If you wish to complain about a comment, contact us [here](#).

* Your email address will not be displayed

** To avoid [register now](#) or [login](#)

Get The Herald delivered to your door.
telephone: 0141 302 7300 or
email: circulation@glasgow.newsquest.co.uk



The Herald
STAYING FRIENDS
A NUMBER AMBITIOUS ON
OLIVY WILKINSON
BRITING
STRESSED OUT?
WHY SHOULD YOU BE?
TODAY TO MELAA
Glasgow-Edinburgh rail pledge

